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What's In a Name? On Coptic {ⲛⲁ-} "{he} of-"

In a terminological note with the title, "*The Possessive Relation Marker in Coptic*" (*Enchoria* 12:191-193, 1984), P. SWIGGERS criticizes and corrects the conventional[1] designations "possessive article" or "possessive prefix" for ⲛⲁ-/ⲧⲁ-/ⲛⲁ- "he/she/they of-" and, much less explicitly, {ⲡⲉϥ-} "his". Following several arguments meant to establish that these morpheme set(s) are "neither an article, nor a prefix", Dr. SWIGGERS offers to replace the current terms by a new one, namely "possessive relation-marker", presumably for both {ⲛⲁ-} and {ⲡⲉϥ-}.

Welcome and worthy as any attempt is *per se* to review and question the prevalent grammatical nomenclature, and all the more so in such a subsystem, central but underservedly under-treated in Coptic, as noun-phrasal syntax, few will avoid the reflection that the price for replacing tradition, when this entails fundamentally fallacious theoretical and specific argumentation, with blatant misunderstanding of the *Grund-problematik* involved, is too high to pay. There is no indication that Dr. SWIGGERS is conscious of the fact that traditions have their starting-points and their histories, to be pondered as an unnegligible part of the evidence needed for relating the term to the phenomenon. The rate and capricious facility of change in scientific terminology seems

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[1] SWIGGERS refers - no less conventionally, and much more objectionably, to TILL's and WALTER's grammars (particularly telling is the reference to KOSACK, which alone is almost enough to induce the informed reader to skip hurriedly the paper and go over to the next); One notices the absence of STERN's and SCHWARZE-STEINTHAL's grammars, incomparably more accurate and insightful than either. STERN (§§ 250-252), perceptively relating the interdependence of {ⲛⲁ-} and its noun lexeme/proper name to that of the article and its lexeme, calls {ⲛⲁ-} "Possessiv-Artikel", while {ⲛⲱ=} and {ⲡⲉϥ-} are "possessive pronouns", in absolute and "conjunct" (proclitic-nuclear) state, respectively. SCHWARZE (p. 352) calls {ⲛⲁ-} "Possessiv-Demonstrativ", thereby following SCHOLTZ-WOIDE (Oxford 1778, § 53; {ⲛⲱ=} is "*pronomen* possessivum", § 52). In the main, however, these terms can be traced back to the TATTAM-ROSSELINI-PEYRON - UHLEMANN heritage of Coptic grammatical study in the focal second third of the nineteenth century. TATTAM (London 1830, pp. 21f., 29ff., 39f., 42ff.) distinguishes between the "possessive pronoun" {ⲛⲱ=}, "pronoun infixes with the article" ({ⲡⲉϥ-}) and the "genitive case" ({ⲛⲁ-}). ROSSELINI (Rome 1837, p. 43ff.) calls ⲛⲁ-, ⲧⲁ-, ⲛⲁ- "articuli possessivi *vagantes*" while {ⲡⲉϥ-} and {ⲛⲱϥ} are "articuli possessivi *orti*" (i.e. *ab articulis determinantibus* and *a demonstrativis*, respectively, thus suggesting transformational relationships in the synchronic system. For PEYRON (Rome 1840, p. 32) {ⲛⲁ-} is "articulus possessivus, omnibus linguis ignotus" -{ⲡⲉϥ-} is probably included among the "pronomina praefixa". UHLEMANN (Leipzig 1853, §§ 14,25) calls {ⲛⲁ-} and {ⲡⲉϥ-} "articuli possessivi" - both being prenominal - whereas {ⲛⲱ=} is "pronomen possessivum quasi demonstrativum". To turn to the most recent scientific grammar of Coptic, VERGOTE's *Grammaire* (IIa, Louvain 1983, pp.126-128): all are "morphemes syntaxiques du substantif": {ⲛⲁ-} and {ⲛⲱ=} are "primary possessive pronouns", {ⲡⲉϥ-} is a "secondary possessive pronoun" (cf. STERN's absolute and conjunct) which actualizes the noun, i.e. is a determinator. I find VERGOTE's formulation in principle adequate, although the *primary: secondary* hierarchy is out of place in non-transformational synchronic description (also, exception may be taken to his inclusion of possessive suffixes under "secondary possessive pronouns").

to an extent to be a measure (in inverse proportion) of the maturity and inner security of a discipline, for that very reason, namely the willingness implied to face up to its past.

While I have no intention to embark here on an exposé of Coptic (pro)nominal syntax[2], I still feel it is urgent and vital to react to certain perfunctory and obfuscating statements made categorically, with astonishing superficiality, by Dr. SWIGGERS in his terminological note. To be frank, I find this is more essential than to comment on his proposed terminological substitute (for which, however, see below).

(1) "Possessive article or adjective", with note 2 on p. 191: (from the semantic point of view) "the complex morpheme (ⲡⲁ-, ⲧⲁ-, ⲛⲁ-, ⲡⲉⲕ- etc.) functions as an adjective". This is meaningless as a descriptive statement, and presumably must be taken to mean "is rendered by a possessive adjective in such languages as have one" - but then, the use of "function", even modified by "semantic", is reckless and misleading.

(2) Of all Dr. SWIGGERS' arguments against {ⲡⲁ-} being an "article", the only one worthy of serious consideration is that the noun lexeme following {ⲡⲁ-} may itself be determinated (or it may be a proper name, which is in paradigm with the determinator rather than with the lexeme, A.S.-H.). This alone is, however, inconclusive without further elaboration, in view of such cases of 'hyperdetermination' (that is, expansion of a determinator by determinated syntagms) as ⲛ-ⲛⲉⲧ- and ⲟⲩ-ⲧⲉⲓⲙⲓⲛⲉ[3], where, of course, the determinator stands in a different analytical rank from the syntagm expanding it. However, the statements following this on p. 192 are certainly unacceptable and Dr. SWIGGERS' ignorance of the implications is here plain to see: "they (i.e. ⲡⲁ-, ⲧⲁ-, ⲛⲁ-) are used predicatively ('the one of', 'those of')" - what does "predicative" mean in this context? "this is not a genuine feature of articles" - on the contrary, if Dr. SWIGGERS uses "predicate" in any way approaching the usual: it is the determinator which is the prime predicative constituent in the delocutive Nominal Sentence pattern[4] # *Pred.N* - {ⲡⲉ} (-*Subj.N*) # , and not the noun lexeme. I must disagree sharply with S. when he argues: "As a matter of fact, articles are used attributively with nouns, upon which they are dependent" - the exact opposite is true: noun lexemes are used 'attrib-

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[2] A monographic study of the syntax of the proper name in Coptic, relating it to appellative and pronominal syntax, is being conducted by the present writer.

[3] The latter only for indefinite determinators (cf. the idiomatic ϯⲙⲓⲛⲉ ⲛ̄- , e.g. in Shenoute ed. LEIPOLDT III 92.20, which probably serves for definite nuclei).

[4] Cf. SHISHA-HALEVY, *"Notes on Some Coptic Nominal Sentence Patterns"*, in *Studien zur Sprache und Religion Aegyptens (Festschrift W. Westendorf*, Göttingen 1984) 175-189, pp. 176, 178.

utively' (i.e. as satellites or expansion) with articles (determinator pronouns), upon which they are grammatically dependent. "The noun preceded by an article functions as the kernel of the nominal syntagm (or noun phrase)" - the evidence in Coptic points unequivocally to the *nuclear* grammatical (not semasiological) status of the non-personal pronominal component of a phrase (not clause) consisting of non-personal pronominals and a lexeme[5]. When more than one pronominal are present, we must resort to Immediate-Consituents Analysis to determine the relative nuclearity: (ⲛⲁ-)[ⲧ-]ⲛⲉ with (-) marking the first, [-] the second nucleus. (Noun) lexemes have in Coptic characteristically satellital status, when in a non-nexal relationship with pro-form grammemes, whether non-personal pronouns or pro-verbs (Tripartite Conjugation bases, ⲧⲣⲉϥ-)[6].

(3) "Article", determination. Dr. SWIGGERS' approach here, perfunctory, nebulous and superficially universalistic, is unfortunate, even if one cannot but concur with his observation (in note 5, p. 192) that the nature of noun determination is still largely obscure. Without bedevilling this discussion with terminological issues, it ought to be realized by now that such terms as "article", "definite", "determined" (and "determination") are anything but self-explanatory names for self-evident and clear-cut linguistic concepts. They are rather traditional, often even school- (or prescriptive-) grammar-traditional names for labelling dimly perceived "classical" Indo-European grammatical phenomena, and beg the question of definition generally (if at all generally meaningful) and certainly language-specifically[7]. To spell the matter out (although this over-simplifies complex discussion): noun determination is not conterminous with an articular system[8], nor is it a simple "category" (in the structural-analytic sense); it is rather *a syndrome* or concurrence of categories and oppositions, such as actualization, phoricity, quantifiedness, specificity and genericity - the "nominal condition", no less.

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[5] Cf. SHISHA-HALEVY, *Coptic Grammatical Categories* (Rome in press) § 5.1.1.0.1 (As a matter of fact, this analysis applies also to other 'articular' languages).

[6] SHISHA-HALEVY, *op.cit.* § 5.3.

[7] A general 'typological-comparative' sketch such as KRÁMSKÝ's *The Article* (The Hague, 1972) is ample proof, both of the sorry state of current typological grammar and of the acute need for thorough language-specific re-evaluation of the most basic of 'general' grammatical concepts. KRAMSKY's account of the Egyptian-Coptic data (and of many other languages) is hopelessly garbled and generally wrong (pp. 83, 89: "Coptic has the definite article *pe, pi* and the indefinite article *u-*").

[8] Cf.W. BIRKENMAIER's perceptive *Artikelfunktionen in einer artikellosen Sprache* (München 1979) on determination in Russian, or B. NILSSON's study of the Turkish determination-syndrome (*OrSu* 27/8:118-131, 1978/9).

Such term as "article" cannot be *per se* meaningful: it begs important questions, and its conventional (at best approximately comparative, "inter-linguistic" at worst ethnocentric) associations are too inaccurate to serve in an untrivial deliberation.

(4) Typical of Dr. SWIGGERS facile labelling and befogging misstatements is (p. 191): "the function of a (definite) article is to determine in a direct way its referent... With the Coptic forms ⲡⲁ-, ⲧⲁ-, ⲛⲁ-" - {ⲡⲉϥ} has by now mysteriously disappeared from the discussion, never to be heard of again - "the determination is oblique: the referent is fixed through its relation (viz. that of being possessed or being dependent upon) with the noun following one of the forms ⲡⲁ-, ⲧⲁ-, ⲛⲁ-"; may I remind the author of JERNSTEDT's perceptive study of the Coptic article, undeservedly neglected these last four decades[9], where he established conclusively that the relation of the article with its noun, far from being "direct" (whatever that may mean), is one of subordinative, "partitive", in a sense "possessive" dependence?

(5) (p. 192) "Prefixes have no independent meaning, but they make up one meaning together with a lexical morpheme which follows them". Quite apart from SWIGGERS' unwarranted (and incorrect) generalization, surely prefixation (as suffixation, infixation, affixation) is a name for a purely formal-relational, not functional-relational concept, with approximately the same universal validity and transpicuity as "word"- that is to say, it is language-specifically definable in junctural terms, with no necessarily coextensive semantic correlates. Leaving aside the question whether traditional morphological nomenclature is of advantage in Coptic, {ⲛⲁ-} seems certainly comparable (although not identical) to other nuclear pronominals ({ⲛ-}, {ⲛⲉⲓ-}, {ⲛⲉϥ-} with which, however, it does not constitute a paradigm or category:

ⲛⲁ- ‖ ⲛ-
ⲛⲉⲓ-
ⲛⲉϥ- ‖

Still further afield, {ⲛⲁ-} must also be considered together with pro-forms in general, notably the "Tripartite Conjugation bases" and the causative conjugation base ⲧⲣⲉ-, with their nominal or pronominal actor; and that regardless of whether or not, or to what degree, they are semantically fused with the verb lexeme: this is of no immediate grammatical relevance or measurability, and is anyway a gradient rather than

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[9] *"K determinacii v koptskom jazyke", Sovetskoje Vostokovendenije* 6:52-62, 1949, German translation by P. NAGEL, in: *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Universität Halle*, 27/3:95-106 (1978).

binary property. Whether or not they are "prefixes" is a pseudo-problem; what matters is the junctural opposition between their final-boundary properties when the boundary element is a grammeme or a lexeme: ⲁϥ- *vs.* ⲁⲡⲣⲱⲙⲉ #. In the light of this misapprehension, it is not surprising to read SWIGGERS' secondary characterization: "prefixes are incorporated to the morpheme(s) they are associated with", where his unawareness of complexity is plain to see: this again begs the question rather than settles the issue.

(6) Finally, regarding SWIGGERS' own "possessive relation-marker" (assuming this to mean 'possessive-relation marker', the orthography notwithstanding), one can but query whether "possessive" is best suited to convey the semantic *Leistung* of the dependence in question: such instances as ⲛⲁ-ⲧⲡⲉ, ⲛⲁ-ⲙⲙⲉ, ⲛⲁ-ⲛⲟⲟⲩ, ⲛⲁ-ⲙⲙⲟⲥⲧⲉ[10] (all taken from Shenoute's homilies), ⲡⲁ-ⲧⲟⲟⲧ, ⲡⲁ-ⲡⲁⲙⲁϩⲧⲉ ("he *to whom* might belongs", not *vice versa*) are by no means possessive; this would in fact be tantamount to ascribing exclusively possessive meaning to relational morphs such as English "*of*", French *de*, German *von* - or, for that matter, to the Coptic *nota relationis* ⲛ̄-. The truth of the matter is that {ⲡⲁ-} expresses, *pronominally* and nuclearly, precisely the same dependence as does ⲛ̄- for nuclear *noun syntagms* : TUKI's and STEINTHAL's *"relatio"*, a broad semantic spectrum ranging from the vaguest appurtenance to inherent ("inalienable") possession.

{ⲡⲁ-} is thus certainly a relation marker, but its true distinction lies in its *pronominal* (gender-number-determination-characterized) nuclearity : a genuine relational pronoun, in its pre-pronominal alternant form ({ⲡⲱ=}) further expandable by a lexeme alone (that is, not by another pronoun or a proper name, the latter proving in many grammatical respects its affinity with pronouns). This lexeme is actualized by {ⲡⲉϥ-} which, like other pronouns expanded exclusively by lexemes, is a determinator pronoun, in a different analytic category from {ⲡⲁ-} : ⲡⲁ-ⲡⲉϥ-ⲥⲟⲛ. I would therefore advocate the use of "relational pronoun" for {ⲡⲁ-}, {ⲡⲱ=} and "possessive determinator" (or "possessive article") for {ⲡⲉϥ-}. Although this precise terminological distinction is not encountered in the nineteenth-century tradition of Coptic grammar,[11] it has been synthesized

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[10] The *number* categorization (ⲡⲁ-:ⲛⲁ-) of our morpheme is obviously also of some significance for its semantics.

[11] Nor, for that matter, the main twentieth-century grammars. STEINDORFF's terminology, almost unmodified from the first edition of the *Grammatik* (1894) to the *Lehrbuch* (1951), has been established as standard through TILL's grammar (1961^2 §§ 203-205): {ⲡⲁ-} "Possessivpraefix", {ⲡⲱ=} "absolutes Possessivpronomen", {ⲡⲉϥ-} "Possessivartikel".

from the highlights of that tradition; it is this very distinction that is presumably rejected, and certainly ignored, by Dr. SWIGGERS in his note.

We have here, then, a forceful reminder that, while it is true that traditional concepts of grammar are in constant need of reappraisal - in the light of new data or new insights, cogent analysis and synthesis, with a modicum of self-criticism, and not condescending "new methodology" - it ought to be realized that "traditional" as attribute of "terminology" is by no means always synonymous with "outdated", "inaccurate" or inadequate".